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SUBJECT: NEW HDZ AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON

1. (SBU) CROATIA'S NEXT AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. WILL LIKELY BE NEVEN JURICA, CURRENTLY CHAIRMAN OF THE PARLIAMENT'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. NEWS OF JURICA'S LIKELY APPOINTMENT WAS LEAKED TO THE PRESS ON MARCH 28, AFTER HIS CANDIDACY HAD BEEN APPROVED BY WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A CONFIDENTIAL HEARING IN THE PARLIAMENT. WHEN WE MET WITH HIM

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ON MARCH 30 TO DISCUSS OTHER MATTERS, JURICA CONFIRMED HIS NOMINATION AND EXPRESSED EMBARRASSMENT AT ITS BEING MADE PUBLIC BEFORE RECEIVING AGREEMENT. JURICA SAID THAT IF HIS APPOINTMENT IS APPROVED BY PRESIDENT MESIC AND BY THE USG, HE WOULD HOPE TO BE IN PLACE IN WASHINGTON BY JUNE 2004.

2. (SBU) JURICA WAS ONE OF THE ORIGINAL FOUNDERS OF THE HDZ AND IS ONE OF ONLY TWO SUCH FOUNDERS WHO REMAIN INFLUENTIAL IN FORMING PARTY POLICY. A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF PARTY PRESIDENT (NOW PM) IVO SANADER THROUGHOUT SANADER'S SUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO GAIN CONTROL OF THE HDZ, JURICA WAS "POLITICAL SECRETARY" OF THE PARTY THROUGHOUT THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN. HIS TASK WAS TO KEEP LOWER-LEVEL CANDIDATES "ON MESSAGE" AND HIS WORK WAS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE HDZ'S ELECTION VICTORY. WHILE JURICA IS NOT A MEMBER OF THE VERY SMALL CIRCLE OF SANADER'S CLOSEST ADVISERS, HE HAS DIRECT ACCESS TO BOTH THE PM AND FM ZUZUL.

3. (SBU) DURING THE TUDJMAN ERA, JURICA SERVED AS CROATIA'S AMBASSADOR TO AUSTRALIA, BULGARIA AND NORWAY AND SERVED A BRIEF STINT AS THE GOVERNMENT'S SPOKESMAN. CROATIA'S PRESS IS REPORTING THAT HIS ASSIGNMENTS TO CANBERRA AND OSLO WERE TAINTED BY FINANCIAL "SCANDALS." DIASPORA GROUPS IN AUSTRALIA COMPLAINED ABOUT THE COST OF BUILDING CROATIA'S CHANCERY, AND THE RACAN GOVERNMENT USED REPORTS THAT JURICA OVERSPENT HIS REPRESENTATIONAL ACCOUNT AS A PRETEXT TO RECALL HIM FROM NORWAY. AS SPOKESMAN OF THE TUDJMAN GOVERNMENT, JURICA OBJECTED TO THE 1998 U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT'S CRITICISM OF CROATIA'S POOR RECORD UNDER TUDJMAN.

4. (U) NOW THAT JURICA'S APPOINTMENT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE PARLIAMENT, FM ZUZUL WILL SEND IT TO PRESIDENT MESIC FOR CONCURRENCE. SHOULD MESIC AGREE (AND HE HAS TOLD THE PRESS THAT HE WILL), THE MFA WILL INSTRUCT THE CROATIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON TO SEEK AGREEMENT FROM THE USG.

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